BRITISH COLUMBIA
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WelcomeBC

NEWS RELEASE

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June 23, 2008

Ministry of Attorney General
and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism

WELCOMEBC CELEBRATES FIRST-YEAR SUCCESSES

VANCOUVER – WelcomeBC, a cross-government initiative, has enhanced programs and services for newcomers to Canada and British Columbia and introduced a range of innovative and unique initiatives since its inception last year, Attorney General and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism Wally Oppal announced today.

Premier Gordon Campbell announced WelcomeBC, a strategic framework that unites B.C.'s comprehensive settlement and integration initiatives under one umbrella, on June 13, 2007. Funding is provided in large part by the Government of Canada through the Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Cooperation on Immigration.

Since 2006, funding for settlement services and programs has increased significantly. In 2008/09, the Province will receive $104.3 million in settlement funding from the Government of Canada, up from $75.4 million the previous year and $40.4 million in 2005/06. Together, the Province and federal government will have invested a total of $297 million in WelcomeBC between 2006/07 to the end of 2008/09.

"WelcomeBC has taken huge steps in its first year and we will continue to build on our accomplishments," Oppal said. "Our government is committed to providing the best services possible in supporting immigrants in their adjustment to Canadian society so they can realize their dreams and prosper in our vibrant province and strong economy."

British Columbia welcomes close to 40,000 newcomers each year. Immigration is essential to help B.C. achieve its economic goals for the coming decade. Since the inception of WelcomeBC in 2007, programs have been expanded to new areas, targeted services for specific client groups – including youth, seniors, women and refugees – have been and are being developed and collaborations and partnerships between ministries and sectors have increased. The Province continues to build and develop new services and initiatives to better support the settlement and adaptation of B.C. newcomers.

"Building multicultural communities is an ongoing challenge and a responsibility shared among the public, private and community sectors," Oppal said. "The best successes come when we all work together to foster greater respect and understanding for people from all cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups."

Progress continues in four priority areas:

- expansion of English as a second language (ESL) training for adults to improve newcomer integration into B.C. society and the labour market;
- expanded labour market information and supports to improve labour market access for newcomers;
- enhanced settlement and adaptation initiatives to support the successful settlement of newcomers into B.C. and their communities; and

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- building welcoming communities, through fostering community capacity building, promoting multiculturalism and addressing racism.

Highlights during WelcomeBC's first year include:

- Waitlists have been reduced for beginner and lower intermediate ESL. Labour market ESL classes are being offered outside of Metro Vancouver.
- Specialized ESL classes for youth, seniors and refugees are in development.
- Funding has been doubled for basic English-language training services for immigrant adults, from $15.6 million in 2005/06 to $32.5 million in 2008/09.
- A new program has been developed to support communities in building welcoming and inclusive communities.
- Provincial pilot projects and programs, such as SWIS (settlement workers in schools) and outreach services for immigrants with multiple barriers, are providing new ways of helping the most vulnerable newcomers, including refugees, children, youth, women and seniors.

"British Columbia is rich in its diversity," said Dave S. Hayer, parliamentary secretary for multiculturalism. "Our government will continue to work at building a society in which there are no barriers to the full and free participation of all citizens in the economic, social, cultural and political life of our province."

Key ministries delivering WelcomeBC services and programs include Attorney General, Economic Development, Advanced Education, Education, Community Services, Child and Family Development, Health, Tourism, Sport and the Arts and Public Safety and Solicitor General.

For more information, go to www.WelcomeBC.ca.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

Media contact: Dave Townsend
Senior Public Affairs Officer
Ministry of Attorney General
250 387-4962
250 889-5945 (cell)

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BACKGROUNDER

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WELCOMEBC: FIRST-YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

The increase in federal settlement funding in support of WelcomeBC is significant, from a base of $38 million in 2005/06 to $84 million in 2007/08. The following are highlights of funding announcements made in 2007/08 through WelcomeBC. Unless otherwise noted, funding is over a two-year period (2007/08 through 2008/09).

- $9 million to reduce wait lists for adults taking beginner English as a second language (ESL) training.
- $12 million to expand intermediate English language classes.
- $2 million to expand intermediate English language classes with a labour market focus to regions outside Metro Vancouver.
- $8 million to increase information and settlement services.
- $11 million for the settlement workers in schools (SWIS) initiative to help newly arrived immigrant families connect with services and resources, orientation information and support.
- $1.6 million for combined language and information services to assist newcomers facing multiple barriers.
- $2.3 million for development of www.WelcomeBC.ca, to provide co-ordinated information to assist new and prospective immigrants.
- $1.8 million in BC Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism Program funding for immigrant and Aboriginal peoples' projects across the province.
- $341,562 provided to 33 community-based and Aboriginal organizations through the BC150 Mosaic Grants. These one-time grants honour the contributions of Aboriginal people and immigrant pioneers to B.C.

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